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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on reading instruction shows that the earliest reference to content area reading practice was in 1919 when William S. Gray reported that he had asked high school teachers to list the uses that pupils make of reading in preparing assignments. In 1925, the adage "every teacher a teacher of reading" first appeared in the yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. By the time the International Reading Association was formed in 1955 principles and specific skills of content area reading were defined, and many of the practices now advocated were expressed. The International Reading Association became the conduit for an organized and sustained thrust to teach reading in all content areas. There has been an increase in the listings on the subject in conference programs, in the number of dissertations on the subject, in the occurrence of courses on content area reading, in the number of textbooks and journal articles, and in commercial materials available. The results of many recent surveys on the topic of content area reading suggest that greater numbers of inservice and undergraduate courses are needed and that state-mandated reading courses are necessary at the secondary school level. (MKM)

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CONTENT AREA READING IN RETROSPECT

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CONTENT AREA READING IN RETROSPECT

Walter Hill, in his 1979 text Secondary School Reading: Process, Program, Procedure outlined the five patterns of content area reading practice (17). His statement could likewise serve as a conclusion concerning the present status of the issue.

The fifth pattern . . . is that all secondary reading instruction -- developmental included -- should be handled within the content classroom setting. This . . . seems quite unrealistic in view of the present state of content area teachers' preparation in reading and its instruction, the unnecessary conflict in instructional emphasis this would cause for content area teachers and departments, and the likely negative overreactions against the secondary reading effort this would engender among content field educators. Moreover, those holding such a position grossly underestimate the extent of classroom effort and time that it would take to do an adequate job of teaching, practicing, and implementing all of the maturing reading behaviors. (p. 99)

Hill advocates a total comprehensive secondary reading program in which content reading is but one, albeit an essential, strand. While accepting Hill's argument that we push less "to expect the content area teacher to be a reading teacher per se," this paper investigates and advocates the pattern described above. This strand must be strengthened if the total comprehensive secondary reading program is to succeed.

The initial premise for this study was based on the faulty assumption that concern for reading in the content classroom was of relatively recent origin, almost parallel with the growth and development of the International Reading Association (IRA). In fact, most of the principles--the argument itself and many of the practices--were in the

literature of reading, and in the broad educational literature, for decades before.

The Beginnings

IRA was formed in December 1955 through the merger of the International Conference for the Improvement of Reading Instruction (ICIRI) and the National Association of Remedial Teachers (NART). Its first convention (annual meeting) was held in Chicago in May of 1956. That conference, themed around "Better Readers for our Times", included thirty-six major presentations -- each with a discussant or panel of discussants that considered problems faced by teachers at all levels from kindergarten to college, administrators and supervisors. Content area reading was specific to only four of the presentations but the contention that "a reading program [must embrace] all members of the school staff" recurred frequently.

Significantly, only the previous year, "Improving Reading in the Content Areas" had been the focus of the final ICIRI conference, which presentations make up the bulk of the December 1954 issue of The Reading Teacher, its final sponsorship by ICIRI. But content area reading had already a long and respected presence. The beginnings of concern for reading in the content areas are too interesting to be ignored. The earliest reference I have located is in 1919 when William S. Gray reported that he had "requested University of Chicago High School teachers to list the uses which pupils make of reading in preparing assignments" (11). The first major emphasis on reading in all curriculum

areas seems to have come in the 1925 Report of the National Committee on Reading, the twenty-fourth yearbook of National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE). Here, for apparently the first time, appears the enigmatic adage, "Every teacher a teacher of reading." NSSE continues as a major proponent of reading in subsequent yearbooks, The Teaching of Reading: A Second Report (1937), Reading in the High School and College (1948), and Development in and Through Reading (1961), in each the need for reading in all content areas becoming more explicit and insistent. In all of these and in numerous other publications -- although regrettably deceased with the publication of the 1961 yearbook -- Dr. William S. Gray was a leading forceful presence.

Meanwhile, over these same years, concern for reading in specific content areas (social studies, science, civics) appears in a variety of journals (2, 6, 22, 25). Although not numerous, these statements demonstrate strong interest in vocabulary difficulty, text selection, and reading skills necessary in the content classroom. In 1936, James M. McCallister published his Remedial and Corrective Instruction in Reading: A Program for the Upper Grades and High School (19). This would be the first book with any substantial content dealing with the subject matter fields. Separate chapters focus on the problems and opportunities in history, math, science and English. He examines the nature of reading difficulties in each area and the special features (the concept structure, vocabulary, use of text and assignments) of the reading tasks involved. Then, as now, he recognized that: "Teachers frequently find it difficult to provide teaching in reading in connection with the teaching of content courses because such teaching

is regarded as something apart from, and not a part of, the work of content courses." (p. 200)

Other agencies as well expressed interest in broader curricular application of reading. The New Jersey Secondary School Teachers Association produced A Handbook on Reading for All Teachers of Secondary Schools in 1936 (13), and the North Central Association its Attacking Reading Problems in Secondary Schools in 1946 (3). The 1942 NEA research bulletin, Reading Instruction in Secondary Schools (24), included a fairly definitive listing of texts on reading, several of which were specific to junior and senior high schools, notably Strang and Rose, Problems in the Improvement of Reading in High School and College (1940) and the Bonds' Developmental Reading in High School (1941).

So the years previous to IRA were important developmental years for the total concept of concern for reading in the content areas. But already, the principles and the specific skill aspects were defined and many of the practices now advocated were then elaborated. (SQ3R, readability, and cloze were yet to be researched and/or popularized.) Recommendations are surprisingly contemporary, containing the seeds of practically everything recommended today:

1. Utilization of the textbook and of multi-level textbooks: "Perhaps all seventh-grade pupils should study history, but all seventh-grade pupils should not study the subject from the same textbook" (13, p. 37).

2. Vocabulary difficulty for varied school subjects: "In 1926, Adelaide Ayer reported that the vocabulary of the average fifth-grade histories was so difficult that pupils averaging sixth-grade reading were able to comprehend only 25% of the work." (as quoted, 13, p. 37)

3. Clear and flexible assignments; study skills; improving varied specific comprehension skills: the NEA 1942 bulletin indicates awareness of linguistic influences in its brief statement, "Semantic Approach to Comprehension." (24)

4. Responsibility for encouraging reading interest through provision of a wide assortment of attractive materials.

The IRA Years

So what remained for IRA to accomplish? In many ways, IRA became, not alone the conservator, the beneficiary of all this previous scholarship, but the conduit for an organized and sustained thrust. IRA has been the catalyst for constant reexamination and reduction of content area efforts. Through its annual conferences, regional and local conferences and councils, its publications, its invitational seminars, ERIC (CRIER & RCS), and principally through its membership -- providing members a respected forum, a publishing house, recognition, and support -- IRA has become the major proponent of content area reading. Its growth and penetration to every area of schooling and literacy in our society has caught up other organizations and their publications to the urgency, the need -- theory and practice.

Actually cataloging the influence of IRA is a different matter. Quantitatively -- possible though highly unprofitable -- one could examine increased incidence of listings in conference programs, both national and local; the increase in number of dissertations on the subject; occurrence of courses on content area reading; the number of textbooks and journal articles, whether hortatory or research; the fantastic volume

of commercial materials; and even the number of agencies and state departments recommending or mandating courses in secondary or content area reading emphasis. Let us accept that there has been tremendous increment in most of these areas. But mere counting is virtually meaningless. There is little significance in knowing but that four of thirty-seven presentations (9 percent) at the first IRA Conference (1956) were directed at content area reading whereas 49 of approximately 375 such entries (13 percent) appear in the preliminary program for the 1980 conference. In both cases, many other papers, by implication, embraced or related to the various curriculum areas. After all, one can hardly discuss comprehension divorced from content. Or that in each of the several content area bibliographies published by IRA (1966, 1969, 1975), the number of entries doubled. In each case, new categories were introduced and entries updated -- some few continuing through each edition. Or that in surveying "Information Characteristics of the Journal of Reading (1957-1977)," Summers (26) noted percentages of 11, 16, and 13 for content area titles in each of his separate periods. The Journal's editorial policy refined, duplication was eliminated, the quality of research and exposition was scrutinized more carefully, and new developments were included. Certainly the number of dissertations, texts, commercial materials and courses multiplied -- but so too did the number of total doctorates obtained and the massive infusion of federal monies which funded programs, courses and materials.

In specialized subject matter journals during the past quarter century, over 125 articles have appeared dealing with content area reading. (18) Not surprisingly, the majority of these (62%) have related to reading in the English classroom -- particularly vocabulary

development, fostering reading interests, and articulating reading with language arts -- followed by science, social studies, and mathematics. These statements, however, are quite significant: they speak directly to the content area teachers who never see the Reading journals. Still to be examined is the growing incidence of reading and reading in the content areas in the scholarly journals of cognitive processing, linguistics, and curriculum development.

Attitude and Practice

Over two dozen surveys on content area reading have appeared over the years, the majority in the 70's and at least five in 1979 alone. The first survey, administered by NEA in 1941 (24), obtained replies from 1,644 schools in every state and Hawaii. Less than half of the teachers were reported as being alert to reading problems, 53% claiming that their interest area concentrated in one department or field. Subsequent surveys provide mixed results, none particularly optimistic. These surveys are difficult to compare because of localized sampling groups and confusion in terminology regarding attitudes, classroom practices, and knowledge of skills needed or taught. In 1973, replicating an earlier study, Brahm and Walker (4) reported that "most of the subject area teachers are unaware of the majority of reading skills needed by students." Green (12), using a small sample in 1978, reports her respondents as feeling unqualified to handle reading tasks, that such responsibility belonged with elementary teachers or with English teachers in the secondary school. Dupuis and others accepted teacher attitude toward reading "as negative as the literature

suggests" (8) and that "changing teacher behavior and attitudes is at best a long range project" (7). Kiteley (18) remarked on the "difficulty of determining what, in fact, really occurs in the classroom when reference is made to practice."

Surveys tend to conclude with recommendation for a more "systematic" approach to the problem and note that content area penetration will succeed with greater administrative intervention and increased in-service, by making recommended practices the core of undergraduate methods courses, and particularly with state-mandated reading courses at the secondary level. Where administrators care, results are positive (5, 27). Teacher training courses in secondary and content area reading do incorporate all the commonly recommended practices, advantageous for those who take them. In-service does seem to make a difference despite lack of controls and motivation. Although reports are confusing, more states are requiring or considering reading as a requirement for secondary certification in teaching (1). Perhaps a more confident and comforting picture of attitude and practice will emerge as researchers survey this body of teachers. And that research should incorporate Moburg's recommendation that "... [it] compare self reports of teachers with assessments obtained through such other means as direct observations, personal interview, unobtrusive or non-reactive measures" (20, p. 36). There have been advances; we need to be encouraged by the progress. Nonetheless, Hill's 1971 statement is equally applicable today.

The apathy of the secondary content teacher toward reading efforts has been cited for three decades. Perhaps the content teacher of today is more aware of the generalized nature of reading deficiency among secondary students and even

sympathetic toward efforts of improvement -- as long as they are not personally responsible for this help. The problem is complex involving issues of occupational selection, pre-service indoctrination, ego defensiveness, curricular traditions, and professional training among others. It is apparent that the half-hearted inservice programs which have been typical of the past decade are not coping with the task. (16, pp. 27-28)

Current Status

The canon of reading in the content area appears to have been professionally established with the 1948 NSSE Yearbook, Reading in the High School and College (14). It was aptly stated by Fay in two papers (9, 10). Figure 1 affords some comparison of status over the twenty-five years of IRA. Scrutiny indicates basic similarity save for modern specificity and definition.

Over the years, as research and experimentation accrued, some refinement developed. Readability and cloze became accepted practical classroom procedures; psycholinguistic elements have been incorporated, the idiosyncratic nature of particular subject matter content has been defined; and the structured overview with reading and reasoning guides has been elaborated.

For a period, concern focused on how to move these principles, known and acknowledged by reading specialists, into the content classroom. Niles (21) defined the six basic skills a content teacher should know and the basic six lessons she would present to make these same teachers comfortable with both content substance and complementary reading strategies. This same concern with penetration continues today.

Figure I: The Content-Area Reading CanonFay - 1954

1. Provide specific instruction for reading in different content areas;
2. Relate directly to content field;
3. Realize content-concept load;
4. Specify comprehension needs; establish purpose for reading;
5. Clarify technical vocabulary;
6. Realize varied difficulty of textual materials;
7. Adapt to individual differences and range in ability;
8. "Teacher actively ... [increases] ... own professional effectiveness through experimentation." (10, p. 70)

Hill - 1979

1. Identify pupil reading performance characteristics;
2. Facilitate use of classroom sources;
3. Coordinate the reading of sources: unit study;
4. Improve reading assignment;
5. Guide reading of text;
6. Develop class-related specific reading behaviors;
7. Extend independent content reading habits and interests;
8. Adapt content instruction for poorer readers. (17, p. 115)

Examination of Abstracts of the 1979 IRA Convention and of the 1980 Preliminary Program sustains this contention. While topics today include process evolution, psycholinguistic applications, multi- and cross-cultural relevancy, questioning techniques, and others, the major thrust appears to be methods of specific articulation with various subject-matter areas: reading and writing, drama, music, and art. In some respects, modern commentary has returned to argumentation, i.e., how to break down subject matter resistance to what is so obviously (from our viewpoint) sound, researched practice. A recent Journal of Reading article (23) epitomizes the trend. It outlines a five-step program to infiltrate the secondary content area staff: enlisting the most secure teachers, sneaking up on their blind side, volunteering to exemplify, posting subtle hints in the lounge. This description is not intended to belittle -- rather it is an interpretation of a serious and reasonable project -- but it does suggest the stage we have reached, or returned to.

Conclusion

Successful intervention into content area classrooms remains the roadblock to successful comprehensive secondary school reading programs. As reading people, we do know, accept, practice, and proclaim what is needed for satisfying reading of science, social studies, mathematics, home economics, and industrial arts. We know that every competent classroom teacher, perhaps unwittingly, subscribes to the principles and effects them. We may take justifiable satisfaction at what has been accomplished. But we still have too

small an audience -- outside our own field. We possess an enviable array of sophisticated artillery -- not alone our journals but many superb texts. But how do we share these materials and how do we reach the average classroom teacher? Undergraduate courses and in-service continue to have hopeful, if limited, value. Perhaps we need to campaign vigorously for a universal state-mandated reading course for all secondary teachers.

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